

The poverty of Brexit

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The Guardian confirms this morning what many have suspected for some time, which is that the government simply has not got the capacity to manage Brexit and its consequences. In its morning email it says:

Britain does not have the capacity to negotiate new free-trade agreements (FTAs) and is headed for a “cut-and-paste” Brexit where existing EU pacts are replaced with “copycat” deals that continue the same arrangements. The admission by senior government sources increases pressure on Theresa May to broker continuing membership of the single market and customs union.

“We can’t do 40 FTAs, we haven’t got the capacity to do that,” the Guardian has been told by insiders. May and Japan’s prime minister have agreed to strike a “copycat” post-Brexit trade deal, and No 10 hopes more of these can be reached with other nations to help secure continuity and confidence.

This is now, I hope, becoming readily apparent. The government wants to leave the single market but mirror it. Ditto with the customs union. The ECJ must lose its influence to be replaced by a new body looking suspiciously like the ECJ in another guise. Now trade deals are to replicate and even copy EU arrangements.

Three thoughts follow. First this shows the poverty of thinking amongst Brexiteers. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that they were all about branding but had nothing of substance to say or offer when demanding we 'take back control'. The hollowness of that phrase now strips it of even the veneer of dogmatic belief: it was always just a sham.

Second, there is also a poverty of competence on display here. Copy and paste seems to be an appropriate term, but what it suggests is an inability to innovate at a practical level. That there is no belief behind Brexit was always clear, but there's no technical skill either.

Third, there is a poverty of aspiration. We're leaving the EU and the best that we can

hope for is what we had. As ambitions go that's pretty desperate.

All if this is worrying in itself. It reveals that those with a certain political philosophy are even more intellectually bankrupt than even the most sceptical of us thought. More worrying is what follows. Actual poverty will increase as a result of these failures. And that matters.